

Linguistic markers of diversity in everyday life: social factors influencing /au/ and /ai/ in Vermont

Several terms have become useful to capture the ideology influencing linguistic features within a speech community: alternative linguistic marketplaces, conflict vs. consensus norms, inward vs. outward or local vs. non-local social orientations. Perhaps the proliferation in vocabulary, in fact, reflects the realization that as has been found for the dichotomous demographic categories, even the more sociologically based methods of interpreting the structured heterogeneity of the speech community are not always adequate to capture the variation housed within. The current study proceeds from just such a point of inadequacy. A previous, larger study of raising of /ai/ and /au/ in Vermont revealed that gender and age were useful in capturing the patterns of leveling that appeared in these data. However, within each gender- and age-based group, there remained much unexplained variation. The current study sought to analyze this variation by looking at the speech of two age groups of Vermonters: older adolescents and adults. Sociolinguistic interviews of 16 speakers were analyzed acoustically utilizing F1/F2 measurements. Following Milroy (2003) and Chambers (1999), among others, a lifestyle and community affiliation scale that included categories suggested by the speakers' interviews was devised for further interpretation of the findings. Results revealed that not only were some factors more influential than others, but also that the manifestation of lifestyle factors varied by demographic group. Specifically, as is not surprising in a rural obsolescent dialect, age was the most powerful factor overall. Further, results showed that for the more traditional, and probably more highly stigmatized, variables (raising of /au/ and raising of /ai/ in the Canadian raising pre-voiceless environment), the scale was useful in interpreting the behavior of both men and women. However, for other features, (raising of /ai/ before voiced segments and fronting of both /ai/ and /au/), men varied according to social score, but women did not, regardless of age. Finally, some of the most interesting findings, were revealed in the interview content itself. Women and men who had the same affiliation score often had very different ways of demonstrating that affiliation in their lives. In other words, farming and hunting may not only be differentially participated in by women and men, but it may also be the case that men's farming, for example, is not the same as women's farming. Specifically, the women in the study rarely mentioned traditional rural farming or hunting activities. However, when these women did mention such interests, they tended to represent alternative forms of that activity (e.g. horse farming or organic specialty farming as opposed to the more conventional dairy farming.) These women's speech, as might be expected, had fewer local features than the men's, although an occupational survey of both might have placed them in similar categories. In summary, age, gender, affiliation score, and lifestyle, all interact; and all are necessary to explain variation in this post-insular rural community.

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